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000 USSR: MAGADAN, CAPITAL OF THE KOLYMA GOLD EMPIRE

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Part I. The Rise of Magadan (1927-1946)

316 466 1) Introduction: Until the early 1930's the Kolyma region in the northeastern section of Siberia was practically deserted; the only population consisted of several native tribes who were engaged primarily in reindeer breeding. Approximately 173 independent miners were also in the area for the purpose of extracting gold from the rich fields around the Kolyma River; however, in 1931 the Soviet Government, at that time completely lacking gold reserves, began one of its largest enterprises until that time—the exploitation of Kolyma gold on an increasing scale. Labor was primarily prisoners, both criminal and "counter-revolutionary," who were sent to the Magadan area by the hundreds of thousands yearly in an attempt to build the area into a self-sufficient region with only one mission—ship every available ounce of gold to Moscow.

• 115 121 The information contained in this report is primarily derived from published reports made by prisoners who have returned from the Kolyma area after having served their prison terms as forced laborers. Although admittedly this report is historical in nature rather than a concise evaluation of the present situation, it was considered appropriate, due to a lack of general information and knowledge of the area, to present

115 121 a survey of the development and buildup of the Kagadan-Kolyma area with the intention of serving as an introduction to subsequent reports on current activities in the Kolyma region.

[134] 631 2) Physical Features of Kolyma: Kolyma is that region in the northeastern part of Siberia, named for the Kolyma River; the boundaries have never been made public, but it is generally considered correct to state that the entire administrative entity is bordered on the north by the Arctic Ocean, on the east by the Sea of Okhotsk, and on the south and west by the impenetrable forests of the taiga. In the early 1930's the territory consisted only of the districts of the gold fields on the upper Kolyma and the highway which was being constructed to connect the gold fields with the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk (Magadan-Srednikan-Seimchan Highway). With the passage of time other areas were added to the territory; some claim that at present the entire region encompasses not only the Kolyma area and that part bordering on the Sea of Okhotsk but also the regions along the Yana and Indigirka Rivers in addition to the whole of the Chukotsk region and Kamchatka.

Another estimate of the geographical boundaries of the territory claims that the entire Soviet Far East is under the jurisdiction of Khabarovsk Krai (a "krai" is a political subdivision), which in turn contains the following component parts: The Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Lower Amur Oblast, and Kamchatka Oblast (This last Oblast is claimed to comprise Chukchi and Koryak national okrugs; in addition, there are supposedly two distinct areas of oblast size within the Krai: One centered at Khabarovsk and the other at Magadan in the Kolyma territory, in which the constituent rayons come under the direct jurisdiction of the Khabarovsk Krai administration.

625 631 471 Be that as it may, there is ample evidence to support the contention that neither of the two above cited political divisions are technically correct; due to the establishment of Dalstroy (Far Eastern Construction Administration) in 1931-1932, it may be stated with considerable justification that the jurisdiction of Dalstroy extends over all northeast Siberia at the present time, taking in all the land east of the Lena River and north of the River Aldan. If this is the case, the total area is approximately six times that of metropolitan France or some 1,400,000 square miles.

In other words, it is quite clear that the exact geographical boundaries of the region are not known, but it may be at least assumed that Dalstroy, which is an organ of the MVD, has complete control of at least the Kolyma region and most likely the northern areas of Chukchi and Koryak. That the MVD under the name of Dalstroy is in control of large tracts of territory is a proven fact, but the territorial limitations of this organization are not clear.

642 625 3) Administration: The Constitution of the USSR is not formally operative throughout this vast area[1] (equal to approximately 40% of the United States proper), and the usual authority of regional Soviet agencies does not apply. There are no local Soviets in the territory, nor do elections occur with the exception of those for the Supreme Soviet. However, even in this instance, it is worthy of note that the Kolyma representative in the Soviet of Nationalities is Lieutenant General Nishikov of the MVD, chief of Dalstroy. The widespread area and activities under the Dalstroy administration have resulted in an organization where the economic life of the region is combined with legislative, judicial, administrative, and police functions. In the general structure of governmental authority in the USSR, Dalstroy occupies a unique position; it is beyond all doubt an organ of the MVD, and its official name is "Dalstroy MVD." In the organization of the MVD, Dalstroy comes under the authority of one of the Deputy Ministers.

[1] [i.e., the Kolyma region of Siberia — Analyst]